

**Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 14, 2006**

DRAFT

A meeting of the Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee (VCCAC) was held on Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at the American Legion Department of Virginia Building in Richmond.

Members Present:

Vince Burgess, ex-officio	Louis Rossiter
Julia Dillon	Bill Van Thiel, ex-officio
Worth Kenyon	James Walker, ex-officio
Karen Olichwier	

Members Absent:

Joseph Williams (Scott Brown)

Others Present:

Steven Combs, Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Services
Anne Atkins, Director of Communications, Department of Veterans Services
Roz Trent, Program and Administrative Specialist III, Department of Veterans Services
Ron White, Department of General Services

Materials Distributed:

Draft minutes of March 8, 2006 meeting; Veterans Services Foundation Board Retreat Summary of Accomplishments – April 13, 2006; DVS News Release; DVS Organizational Charts; DVS Calendar (June - December 2006); Updated Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee Membership Listing; Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures For FY2005; Request for Information (RFI) – Long Term Care Center Feasibility Study; NASVH Washington Legislative Update – May 4, 2006, Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee Legislative/Budget Update; Information Packet on “The Eden Alternative.”

Welcome

Vince Burgess called the meeting of the VCCAC to order at 11:10 a.m. The roll was called with a quorum of six of the eight member committee being recorded as present. Louis Rossiter arrived after the roll was called.

Commissioner Burgess informed the Committee that Joseph Williams, Director of the Hampton VA Medical Center (VAMC) had accepted the position of Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Operations and Management at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). He would be assuming his new responsibilities effective July 1 and would no longer be able to be a part of the VCCAC. Scott Brown, Chief, Facilities Management Service (138) at the Hampton VAMC would be attending all future meetings as the representative of the Hampton VAMC.

Commissioner Burgess introduced Anne Atkins, who has assumed the role of DVS Communication Director. Ms. Atkins is an on-loan executive from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Review and Approval of March 8, 2006 Minutes

A **motion** was made by Karen Olichwier, seconded by Worth Kenyon, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 8, 2006 meeting.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Burgess gave highlights as follows:

DVS News Release

- Prepared by Ms. Atkins: "*Virginia National Guard and Reservists Could be Affected by Recent VA Data Loss; Veterans Also Affected*," contained tips on ways to protect oneself from identify theft. The news release has been sent to radio stations, to all boards/committees of DVS via e-mail, and is posted on the DVS website. The site has received 8 or 9 hits to-date. A fact sheet had been developed giving contact information that could be used in the case of identify theft. This information has been sent to veterans services organizations for their information.

Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) Retreat Summary Report

- During an April 13th strategic planning session, the VSF established goals and prioritized nine action strategies based on the established goals. A critical issue in assuring that the Foundation is able to further develop strategies and accomplish its goals is to have resources dedicated solely to this effort. Commissioner Burgess stated that Roz Trent, who had led DVS marketing and communications efforts, will be assuming this role. He said that Ms. Trent would also provide support to the JLC and the VCCAC.

DVS Organizational Changes

- The DVS is being reviewed by the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) in the areas of policies and procedures. Based on recommendations from the APA, organizational changes within the Department have been made to address the APA concerns. The Commissioner explained that the financial and administration functions have been separated from the operations function of the Department. This change was critical in order to put more focus on financial operations, and place more emphasis on benefits and other operations of the Department.
 - Armistead Ransone, a retiree employee of the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS), has been hired on a part-time basis as DVS Director of Finance and Administration. While at DMHMRSAS, Mr. Ransone served as Budget Director and has 30+ years of experience. Direct reports to Mr. Ransone will be IT, Procurement/Payroll and Human Resources;

- Bert Boyd, Chief Operating Officer, will oversee operations of the Benefits Section; the Veterans Care Center; Cemeteries; and the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training;
- Steven Combs has been named the Department's Director of Policy and Planning, where he will be in charge of legislative policy development, strategic planning, and supporting the work of the DVS boards;
- Anne Atkins, Director of Communications, will be responsible for all Department marketing and outreach initiatives;
- Roz Trent will assume the Specialist role in working with the VSF, in addition to providing staff support to the JLC and VCCAC.
- Robert (Shack) Shackleford, retired Deputy Commissioner at DMHMRSAS, has been hired as a consultant, working with Bill Van Thiel in developing strategies for interfacing with sister agencies to tap into resources, and assisting Mr. Van Thiel in identifying funds obtained from the operations of the care center.
- Bill Van Thiel gave supporting comments regarding the addition of both Mr. Ransone and Shackleford. He stated that both had brought insight to the operation of the care center; Mr. Ransone has knowledge of the state budgeting system and brings structure in implementing needed policies at the care center; Mr. Shackleford brings both knowledge of the state budgeting system and knowledge of health care.

Benefits Training

- During the week of May 1-4, the Benefit Services Section held a statewide training effort in Roanoke for Veterans Services Representatives (VSRs) from all field offices. In the last 12 months, DVS has hired fourteen (14) new VSRs, and this was the first time that all VSRs had met together to discuss issues. There was representation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), DVS staff, and from other states to train and assist VSRs in understanding best practices in improving services provided to veterans. Training was successful; however, the DVS will rethink logistical arrangements, wherein all DVS benefits field offices will not have to be shut down simultaneously in order to conduct training.

Geographic Distribution of VA for Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (FFY05)

- The Commissioner noted that in FFY05, the USDVA spent more almost \$1.8 billion on programs for Virginia veterans. Virginia ranked #11 for population of veterans in the United States; #10 for Total Expenditures; #9 for Insurances and Indemnities; #8 for Compensation and Pension; and #6 for Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. Virginia receives approximately 10% of the DOD retirement payments in the country (\$4 billion per year). This information clearly indicates the impact of the veterans/military in the state. In addition, a recent article in Governing Magazine indicated that 76% of veterans vote in the U.S.

State Cemetery

- Congressman Rick Boucher released a news release announcing that the House of Representatives had approved language to transfer the property from the Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP) to the Commonwealth of Virginia. This must now be approved by the Senate and then signed by the President as part of the Defense Appropriation Act. Mr. Combs is working with DVS Cemetery Administrator Dan Kemano in preparing preliminary paperwork to be submitted as soon as possible after the Army has permission to transfer 80 acres of land to Virginia for the purposes of a state veterans cemetery. Contacts have been made with the Army's Department of Real Estate and also with the USDVA in preparing required paperwork for the letter of intent to build the cemetery.

Jim Walker suggested that DVS contact the Commonwealth of Kentucky should the Department face any difficulties, as they have experienced the exact same transaction.

Commissioner Burgess stated that there is strong support from Senator Allen and FROM congressmen in the southwest Virginia area. There has been good buy-in from localities and local officials. There was opposition from local private cemeteries, but these concerns have been allayed. The Commissioner informed the VCCAC that DVS will submit news releases of each occurring event (i.e. when the deed is handed over; when ground is broken; when the cemetery opens, etc.) in an effort to raise the public's awareness of the new cemetery.

Old Business:

Legislative and Budget Update

Mr. Combs distributed a legislative/budget update. He reported as follows:

Virginia Veterans Care Center – 240-Bed Facility

- FY 06 base budget
 - 225 employees
 - \$12,914,745 (NGF)
- Governor Warner's proposed budget adding 30 positions in FY 07
 - 25 Certified Nursing Assistants (will afford opportunity to institute a CNA Training Program)
 - 2 Licensed Practical Nurses
 - 1 Registered Nurse
 - 1 Dietary Worker
 - 1 Housekeeper
- Proposed operating budget increases
 - FY 07 - \$14,839,898 (NGF)
 - FY 08 - \$14,970,237 (NGF)

General Assembly budget actions: House Appropriations Committee has approved; Senate Finance Committee has approved. Final budget agreement pending

Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center

- Construction budget (160-bed project)
 - Governor Warner's proposed budget added \$3.22 million (GF)
 - Governor Kaine submitted a budget amendment for an additional \$404,000 (GF)
- Operating Budget (160-bed project) – Governor Kaine submitted a budget amendment that would authorize:
 - FY 07 - 50 positions; \$787,100 operating (NGF)
 - FY 08 – 183 additional positions (total 233 positions); \$11,400,000 (NGF)
 - Treasury loans will be acquired for the startup; loans to be repaid with operating revenue as go through the year. Goal is to reach break-even point by the end of the first full year of operation.
- 80-bed addition is ranked #78 of 129 projects on the priority list for USDVA funding (65% of \$8 million project, or \$5.2 million.)
 - Virginia has already pledged to fund 35% of project costs - \$2.8 million
 - The project is likely 3-4 years out

General Assembly actions: House Appropriations Committee has approved; Senate Finance Committee has approved. Final budget agreement pending.

Commissioner Burgess advised that because of the design of the current facility (under construction) and because of available funding, there has been some “rethinking” of plans to add an 80-bed addition to the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC). He stated that facility was designed to take maximum advantage of available land, while still keeping the new center to a residential scale. The building of single occupancy units means more space is required, and the facility design is better suited to a 40-bed addition, as it could be kept at one level. If 80 single-occupancy rooms were added, a second floor would be needed. Alternatively, the rooms could be added on one floor if they were double occupancy, but this is not preferred.

Ron White further explained that the way the building was originally designed (oriented on the site), the domiciliary addition would be in 40-bed increments. If doubled, the issue of vertical access (elevators) to the second floor, as well as two means of stairway access, would need to be addressed. The original plan was to keep the design at residential scale. This instills a sense of homeliness, and is also based on research that shows single occupancy is more sanitary and instills a sense of privacy.

Mr. Van Thiel stated that the building of a second floor in the addition would require increasing the square footage of the facility because of the elevators and two stairways. The increase in square footage would not be used for patient care, but rather for safety issues. He stated that in addition, there is no need for a large domiciliary unit, and the care center should not be viewed as a homeless shelter. He stated that keeping the size of the building in proper perspective, 40-bed units would be more reasonable. This will not hurt the ability to meet the medical needs, as all medical units will be built. There is just not enough room to add beds. In addition; if a second floor is added, it would necessitate increased staff.

Commissioner Burgess stated that because there are legislators who patroned the bill for an 80-bed addition, as well as veterans and the public, there is a dire need to communicate to make

them aware of the change, and to make sure that everyone understands why an 80-bed domiciliary is unneeded. Mr. Van Thiel has been working on the federal side to update the grant submission.

Mr. Walker stated that the area of major concern will be with the veterans service organizations, which are aware of the original plan for an 80-bed addition. He suggested that DVS, as well as members of the VCCAC, must provide clear, concise information regarding the logical reasons for this change, and issues that impact veterans. He stated that the emphasis should be placed on the fact the reduction in beds in the addition impacts domiciliary care, not skilled nursing care.

Mr. White added that it was originally intended that the design of the SBVCC would be modeled on the 240-bed Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke, and that the existing design would be adapted to the Richmond site. The decision to build all single-occupancy rooms meant that the VVCC design could not be used, since the VVCC rooms are double occupancy. In addition, due to the budget decrease, it was decided that 240-beds was somewhat arbitrary in that it was not based on a design that would fit on the Richmond site, nor was it based what health experts saw as the best way to design the health facility (i.e. single-occupancy rooms). He felt that these were good reasons to introduce new information into the design.

Worth Kenyon stated that there are two things not in favor of this change:

- The result of the pilot project of assisted living at the VA was that this was not feasible.
- There is the population that is looking at the continuum of care.

Commissioner Burgess stated that there may be an opportunity for DVS to purchase dom beds/nursing home services from the McGuire VAMC, and if there was a need for extra beds, individuals could be housed at McGuire.

Karen Olichwier suggested that DVS might look into contracting with individual people to care for veterans in their home. This would provide a more home-type setting, rather than the institutionalized environment.

Mr. Van Thiel emphasized that there will be some veterans who are homeless, and there will be a great deal of pressure to accept homeless people. Extra care will need to be taken in the screening process from a medical perspective to determine who needs medical care and who is homeless. Mr. Walker strongly recommended that it be emphasized that the SBVCC is not a homeless shelter, but rather is a health care facility.

Commissioner Burgess stated that DVS's role is to understand where the gaps are and to look at services that the Department needs to be aware of to fill the gaps. He stated that when the announcement is made, it must be emphasized that there are many options. If not in the federal system, another option could possibly be in a community system (i.e. City of Richmond programs, County of Chesterfield programs, etc.) to make the transition process as seamless as possible. He stressed that whatever option used, the veterans will always be put first and will receive quality care.

In making this announcement, Louis Rossiter recommended that the department not revisit the past, but rather give the logical reasons for the change. He suggested that infectious diseases be added to the rationale for making this change.

Commissioner Burgess stated that once informational packet is once prepared, a draft would be sent to the VCCAC, the JLC, and to the Board of Veterans Services.

Commissioner Burgess stated that the VCCAC will be most instrumental in providing guidance as to how best to handle this issue.

Legislative/Budget Update (continued)

Mr. Combs continued his Legislative/Budget Update:

Hampton Road Veterans Care Center – ranked 128 of 129 on federal priority listing

- Governor Kaine and Delegate Cox submitted budget amendments pledging Virginia to fund \$14.6 million – 35% of the \$41.5 million project
- Delegate Cox also submitted HB 1383, which pledges Virginia to funding \$14.6 million for the project.

HB 1383 has passed the House and Senate unanimously and has been approved by Governor Kaine.

Fisher House at McGuire VA Medical Center

- Approximately \$3.5 - \$4 million project
 - \$1.75 - \$2 million from Fisher House Foundation
 - \$1.75 - \$2 million from local sources
- Governor Kaine submitted a budget amendment for \$1 million for a Fisher House at the McGuire VA Medical Center – this would be half of the “local” money
 - The Senate Finance Committee approved \$1 million
- Delegate Lingamfelter submitted a budget amendment for \$1 million for a Fisher House at the McGuire VA Medical Center – this would be half of the “local” money
 - The House Appropriations Committee approved \$500,000

The Senate and House differences will have to be worked out in the budget conference committee.

Mr. Combs distributed copies of a National Association of State Veterans Home (NASVH) Washington Legislative Update (May 4, 2006). The Update indicated that House Veterans’ Affairs Committee had passed a measure increasing the State Home Construction grant funding from \$85 million to \$105 million for FY 2007. This was a \$20 million increase above what the Administration had proposed. In addition, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies voted to ensure that a least \$20 million of the \$105 million be reserved to fund life/safety modification. This provision was inserted to ensure that no single large ongoing construction project would consume all of next year’s Construction Grant Budget.

Care Center Operational Issues

Mr. Van Thiel reported as follows:

Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC)

- Census is good. There are 6 vacancies on the Domiciliary (Dom) Unit and 2 vacancies in the Nursing Section. The Dom unit has had an average of 59 out of 60 beds filled per month.
- Families continue to be pleased with the type of therapy given at the Care Center
- Recent staff additions include a speech therapist and 2 therapy assistants
- The VVCC recently purchased two vital stem machines used for swallowing
- Renovations:
 - Wall-papering and painting have been delayed due to the requirements of the Davis-Bacon Act. The painting contract will need to be re-bid
 - Carpet is down and most of flooring has been replaced
 - The replacement laundry facility is sixty days behind schedule due to engineering problems, and is not expected to be completed in July
- Storage Building: The VVCC is waiting for elevator sprinkler and elevator inspection. The project should be completed within three weeks

Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center

- The 160-bed construction project is 7 days ahead of schedule.
 - The schedule was reworked to reflect flow of what was actually happening on-site.
 - Construction is going well and within budget.

Mr. Van Thiel stated that staffing at the SBVCC will be quite a challenge. In discussions with Commissioner Burgess, the idea was entertained to make visits in the community to make people aware of the employment opportunity at the SBVCC as part of the recruiting effort. It was noted that nursing positions would not be recruited for in this manner; however, other types of positions would be available (i. e. nursing assistants, etc.)

Commissioner Burgess has shared this idea with Delegate Dwight Jones, who along with serving on the Virginia legislature has a church in the McGuire community. Delegate Jones has expressed his interest in being a part of this effort.

Ms. Olichwier expressed the need for more funding of training programs for nurses at colleges and universities in Virginia. Mr. Van Thiel stated that in an effort to keep attrition levels low, nursing assistants will be trained at the care center. Mr. Kenyon stated that possibly an agreement could be made with the nursing staff at McGuire to assist in training of nursing assistants. Dr. Rossister suggested that training at the community colleges might also be a possibility.

Further discussion of this topic will take place at the next committee meeting.

Hampton Roads Veterans Care Center

- An updated application for federal grant funding will be submitted by July 15

New Business:

Request for Information (RFI) – Future Veterans Care Centers Feasibility Study

DVS has issued an RFI in preparation for a potential solicitation to establish a contract for Long Term Care Facilities for Virginia's Veteran population. The intent of the RFI is to seek information to assist DVS in: (1) identifying parties capable of providing the service and interested in contracting with the DVS; (2) identifying the level of service needed, criteria needed and solutions available, as well as assessing their potential benefit to the DVS; (3) funding sources available to the DVS; and (4) estimating pricing and assessing pricing structures offered for these services. The suspense date for receiving responses to the RFI is June 30, 2006.

The VCCAC will be informed when the preferred contractor is selected. Commissioner Burgess suggested that at the next meeting, the selected contractor be present to discuss (1) their plans; (2) receive feedback from the VCCAC; and (3) come to a future meeting to discuss results.

Julia Dillon asked if there was any thought given to building a center in far southwest Virginia, as there is certainly a need. Commissioner Burgess concurred that there is a need, and stated that there might be the possibility of approaching adjoining states (North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, etc.) to see if there was an interest in partnering to build a facility in southwest Virginia.

The Eden Alternative

Mr. Kenyon distributed materials and gave a brief presentation on the Eden Alternative. Discussion ensued. Commissioner Burgess stated that this might be an approach considered for the SBVCC. He suggested that a more in-depth presentation be given at a future meeting.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Schedule Next Meeting (date/location)

Commissioner Burgess suggested that the VCCAC have its next meeting at the McGuire VAMC to tour the SBVCC construction site. Mr. Kenyon will work with DVS staff in securing a meeting room. Committee members will be advised of the exact date, time and location. Committee members needing travel/hotel accommodations should contact Ms. Trent. Lunch will be provided.

Commissioner Burgess was congratulated on receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award for accomplishments made at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Adjourn

There being no future business, the meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.